

Statement of  
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Prepared for delivery to  
Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management  
Committee on Agriculture

For a hearing on

Options for the 2007 Farm Bill

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1300 Longworth House Office Building  
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MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for asking me to join this distinguished panel. I am honored and pleased to be with you, in a familiar and warmly remembered hearing room, with so many former colleagues and friends.

You will hear many policy prescriptions, many of which are not new nor into which can I shed much light. In the nearly thirty years of writing farm bills, in one way or another, I have seen most, if not all, of the ideas I believe will be presented to you as you do your work on the next farm bill.

If nothing else, farm bill debates have produced creativity and imagination – most for the good, some just bewildering. If I have one piece of advice: produce clarity of basic policy choices.

In that vein, let me address what I will call the five R's: Resources, research, riches, reform, and right:

Resources: Now more than ever, we must invest in the sustainability of our farming base.

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Glickman was Secretary of Agriculture from 1995 to 2001. Before that, he served on the House Committee on Agriculture and was from 1987 through 1992, chairman of what was then called the Subcommittee on Wheat, Soybeans, and Feed Grains, which subsequently was renamed the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and risk Management.

Glickman is now the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Motion Picture Association of America, which represents the six major US motion picture studios. He also serves on the board of directors of several food and hunger related organizations.

The views in this statement are his and his alone.

Research: Agriculture is no different than any other part of the economy in one vital respect: We must invest in research and innovation to meet our needs and stay competitive.

Riches: We spend an awful lot of money on these programs, and an awful lot goes to a very few, in a narrow segment of the farming community; could we do a better job of distributing this income?

Reform: Every farm bill debate is laced with talk of reform; this one will be too. I will submit, however, that while we have made some admirable changes over my three decades of experience, we have backtracked a bit in recent years. If we are serious about farm policy reform for the future, then we need to move forcefully in that direction.

Right: For all the resources we protect, research we conduct, riches we distribute, and reform we discuss, we still have far to go in addressing one of the paramount right things we can do in this legislation: Ending hunger, here, and overseas.

## RESOURCES:

Every year, we lose both more farmers and more farm land. For years, sitting upon billion bushel surpluses, the loss of farm land to urban sprawl and development seemed a far away problem. We no longer can afford the luxury of that view.

For one, new challenges are affecting the productive base of our farming sector: climate change, creeping environmental problems. The future, indeed, is now.

Additionally, we are seeing new demands placed on our farming production: Namely, the growing demand for farmers to grow the raw materials for energy production. After years, too, of seeing the ethanol industry struggle, we are now on the threshold of what I predict will be a real take-off in that sector.

Again, when corn surpluses nearly equaled a year's harvest, this would have been a welcome change. Now, however, when gas tanks begin competing for corn as earnestly as the feed mills upon which our multibillion dollar animal agriculture system depends, the equation takes on a vastly new and different variable.

At minimum, I encourage you and your colleagues to devote some dedicated time to examining the implications of this development. As strong a supporter of alternative fuels and alternative uses of agriculture products as I am, I also caution against new programs to provide financial incentives to encourage the use of food and feed products for fuel. I believe we are indeed on the verge of market forces propelling us in that direction, and I fear, in our rush to secure our energy security, we could easily neglect the fundamental need for food security.

I applaud the Congress for continuing to move resources into land conservation and protection measures, and am proud of being able to help in that during my service in the House and as secretary. In this next farm bill, I urge you to look to making sure all sectors of agriculture can take advantage of these incentives – the specialty crops, small and disadvantaged farmers, and I believe we need continuing emphasis on addressing the environmental consequences of animal agriculture.

## RESEARCH:

Few in the general public, perhaps even few on this committee, realize that one of the largest research portfolios in the federal government lies with the Department of Agriculture, and thus within your control. I know I was somewhat astounded to learn that when I became secretary, even after nearly 20 years on this committee.

Our investment in agriculture research over the last century has yielded tremendous results. It is true: That investment has much to do with the fact that a very small minority of American produce the most abundant, most affordable food supply in human history.

Protect that capability. Invest in research. Do it wisely.

While most in the general public know nothing about the enormous accomplishments of this program, most know of it from the apocryphal examples the press, politicians, and others cite in criticizing pork barrel spending.

I know all the justifications supporting the merits of all these examples. I also know that not every agricultural school in every wheat growing state needs a multimillion dollar research program on drought resistant, dwarf strains of spring wheat. While competition, particularly competition in science and research is beneficial, not every state agricultural college in the country needs a program on new and innovative uses of agricultural products.

I have looked at all side of this: from your perspective, from administering and managing the programs, and from the outside advising on securing earmarks for this or that interest. I am not so naïve as not to understand the political necessity of some of these programs, but we have gone too far.

We have an agricultural research system beholden to political considerations – and not just in government, in the institutions themselves. The system is in danger of collapsing under this weight.

While Congress' have tried reform in the programs, as did we while I was at the Department, none of us have really wrung the politics out of this system that we must to ensure our scientists have the resources they need to meet our future challenges. I urge you to give this your attention.

## RICHES

Five years ago, understandably, the farm bill was about national security. At other times, the farm bill has been about our competitiveness in the global economy, and about preserving a rural way of life, a culture, an ethic.

This search for the metaphysical motivation of farm policy is interesting, but can be mind-numbing. Instead of chasing the string theory of farm bills, let me submit we examine one of the metaphysical facts and consequences of farm bills: They redistribute income from the non-farming sector to the farming sector, and they transfer lots and lots of money.

Some of it is quite straight-forward: Direct payments to farmers. Some is somewhat more circular and indirect: The income is transferred in the manner in

which the bills manipulate the levers of supply and demand, whether by restricting the fruits and vegetables a farmer can grow in his soybean field, the quality her oranges must meet before allowed into the market, or in the powdered milk donated as surplus.

No matter how this income is transferred – by conservation programs or in milk price supports – a fundamental fact applies virtually to all programs: The most goes to the biggest.

Twenty years ago, one of the most monumental debates that occurred in this room was over the future of the Farm Credit System, and the boggling debt farmers were facing. If we had then tapped the treasury to pay off every distressed farm loan then, or even to pay off every outstanding farm real estate loan then on the books, I believe we would have spent less than we have in farm bills since then. I took on this challenge, this challenge of directing farm payments to those most in need, Mr. Chairman, when I sat in your chair, with valiant ambitions but, I must admit, less than complete results.

I am a firm believer in a safety net. I also have no qualms about spending money on farm bills, lots of money.

I remain amazed, however, that of all the federal assistance and income transfer programs or the assistance we offer through tax incentives, farm programs, basic commodity programs, remain largely immune to any needs-based test.

I know we apply payment limits; we also know how cleverly they are defeated. Not only do I have substantive problems with the lack of meaningful means testing in these programs, I am concerned at the political and public black eye they give these programs.

## REFORM

That leads to my next R: Reform. Whether goading by good government, some need to ensure our programs are consistent with world trading rules, or simply the perennial desire for change, reform permeates every debate.

Still, the basic commodity programs stay pretty much basically the same as they have historically. The same crops are targeted, meaning the same parts of the country, and indeed the same individuals and families. Our agriculture is so much more diverse.

We have made progress: Notably, government no longer dictates, by and large, what a farmer can plant, and, as I also noted, farmers are now more handsomely rewarded for sound stewardship of their resources.

Already in this debate, some argue for simply extending the current farm bill. I would not favor that course; I hope you opt against it.

But if not, let us be clear to our farmers, our taxpayers, and indeed the world: US agriculture policy will, for the time being, hew to the status quo. We are no longer in the reform game, whether pressured domestically or by international forces.

Perhaps this is only a rhetorical nuance – reform is of course in the eye of the beholder or the proclaimer – but there is a fundamental course of action to decide: Whether to continue a program of supporting the basic commodity growers, perhaps with marginal refinements, or attempting to address the needs of all of agriculture, and indeed all the other needs of rural America that farm bills reach that I have not mentioned, and doing so in a fiscally prudent manner.

RIGHT

I often told audiences when I first joined the Committee and then again when I became secretary that one of my main qualifications for both was that I liked to eat. I still do.

Perhaps one of the most satisfying, and I believe important, problems I took up during my career and that I continue to be involved with is hunger.

I am proud of my work on food stamp legislation, nutrition assistance and education, expanding the school breakfast program, the McGovern-Dole international food for education program – two programs I strongly urge you to fund fully. I am likewise proud of my own personal crusade for gleaning and food recovery – something I am pleased to say I have taken on even now with the movie studios.

I am not proud that in spite of the millions, the billions, the dedication of thousands and thousands, this problem still afflicts us. Whether Darfur, Detroit, or even, Mr. Chairman, Dodge City, hungry faces stare at us.

As you write your farm bill, and you naturally focus your attention on those that produce our food, please remember those who need our food, the hungry at home and the hungry around the world.

I know your challenges are many. I also know the work of the next farm bill will largely take place in this room and its anterooms. Farm Bills are creatures of Congress – a lesson I really appreciated when I was Secretary of Agriculture, with some frustration.

Protect our resources from which our food comes. Invest in research to make sure we have food in the future. Distribute our riches wisely and efficiently. Move on a path of reform that will serve all who depend on farm bills in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Finally, do the right thing, for the hungry who will not appear before you, who belong to no commodity group or trade association, and who cannot hire lobbyists, for it truly will be the most rewarding, enduring, and meaningful legacy of your efforts.

Good luck, and thank you.

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